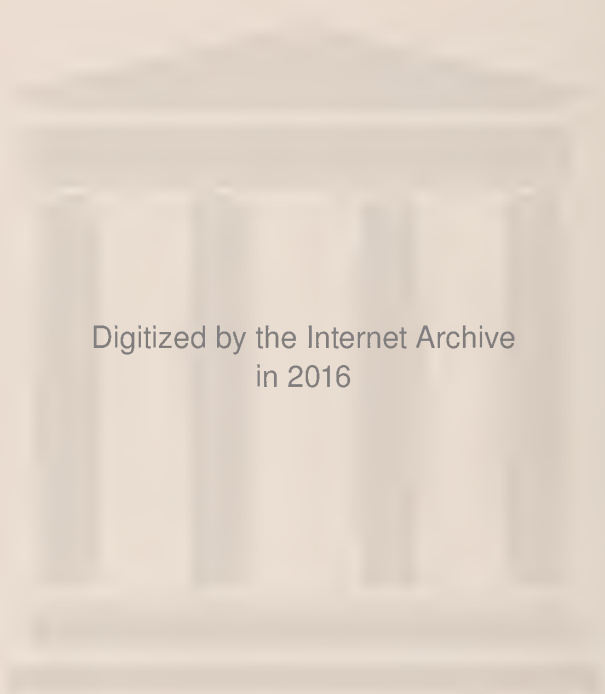


Korea

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A Christian Literature
for Korea.



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A Christian Literature — for Korea. —

BY THE REV. J. S. GALE, D.D.

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THE BOOK AND TRACT SOCIETY.

In the year 1891 the Korean Religious Book and Tract Society was formed, with the object of getting Christian literature into the homes of fourteen million people. The Society began with a capital of about one hundred dollars, what the missionary community could contribute, and yet the world it undertook to touch and influence represented a population twice that of the State of Pennsylvania.



REV. J. S. GALE D.D.

ITS FIELD OF OPERATION.

The people of Korea belong to one of the earliest civilized races of the East. Tradition relates how an angel appeared about 2300 B.C., and taught the Koreans to know and love God. A large temple, erected in Pyeng Yang in 1429 A.D., to the worship of this god-man, would seem to say that sometime, somewhere in Korea, some remarkable being had lived. They called him Prince Sandalwood, and to-day, besides this temple, a huge altar of stones, such as the dolmen builders handled, stands to his memory on Maree mountain, within sight of Chemulpo harbour.

In 1122 B.C., when Samuel the prophet lived and laboured, a minister of the Chinese government, called Viscount Ki (Ki-ja), came to Korea with the sacred books and classics of the famous Choo Empire. A memorial stone, erected in Pyeng Yang in 1613 A.D., reads, “God’s not permitting Ki-ja to suffer death at the fall of the Eun Empire, China, was because He had reserved him to preach religion to us, and to bring our people under the laws of civilization.”

Ki-ja wrote and taught such things as this, “God, Who dwells on high, has given a conscience to all men, and a mind that makes for good.” “God is not partial, but is ever near to those that call upon Him.” “When men do good, God gives a hundred blessings; but when men do evil, God sends His punishments.” (These

extracts are taken from the *Book of History* of which Ki-ja is one of the authors.)

The land is dotted with stones inscribed with long inscriptions, that reflect the mind of Korea, and tell



A WHOLE BIOGRAPHY IS WRITTEN ON THIS STONE.

where its longings lie. The oldest of these stones stands three miles north-east of Seoul on a rocky peak, one thousand eight hundred feet high, where the full force

of wind and weather have beaten on it since 555 A.D., and yet we can still decipher, from its time-worn face, such words as, “. . . faithfulness and devotion . . . glory . . . wisdom, . . . great sacrifice . . . heaven.”

Another stone set up in 937 A.D. refers to a good priest, whose memory it perpetuates. Among other things it says, “In the troubled days of the close of Silla, he stood between God and men as an intercessor.” These great stones reflect through one thousand five hundred years the mind of the people—a mind that desired light, understanding, knowledge, truth, God. In spite of long periods of official corruption and a hopeless government, this mind still exists.

THE PRESENT OUTLOOK.

The ancient voices of the Buddha, of Confucius, of the old Philosopher, spoke a message in their day that was better far than no voice, but they are silent now or unpersuasive. The nation is calling for a light in advance of these, and if it finds it not, will turn more to non-belief and infidelity. Would that we had a Christian literature that could meet such a day as this !

WHAT HAS BEEN DONE.

The Society has done much in these years in the millions of pages that it has published, and sent to the farthest corners of the land.

The writer recalls a tour made years ago, with six Korean companions, into a new district, when, at evening time, he had one clear-voiced native read to the people that crowded into the room the "Story of the Two Friends," a book issued by the Society. So great was the interest in the conversation of these two, one a Christian and one not, that in the crush the middle partition of the room gave way and fell, nearly choking us with dust. Among the grimy listeners that evening was a Mr. Chun Hoon Suk, who is now a Christian minister in the north of Korea.

The present Korean Secretary of the Y.M.C.A. read the Society's translation of Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" and became a Christian, and is a leader of young men to-day.

It has been a very little force indeed that our Book and Tract Society could bring to bear on these fourteen million people, and yet the influence is evident in places of importance. To really move fourteen million people you need more than was at their disposal, reams of paper, great quantities of ink and the roar of presses hard at work, all of which requires money.

WOMEN RELEASED FROM PRISON.

One of the best results of past effort is the liberty of soul and body that Christian books have brought to Korean women. It is impossible to tell the difference

wrought in a land where once there were no women to be seen in public, to a day when gatherings of hundreds meet for worship and Bible study. The literature of the Society has assuredly been doubly grateful to them.

Oriental women have had a hard time of it. What with concubinage, and seclusion, and being bought and sold as slaves, their sad story has never yet been written. But surely a day of better things is to dawn, and Christian literature will have a large place in the bringing of it about.

THE PRESENT TIME.

It is the time of the breaking up of old ideas and systems that have held the land for a thousand years. The world is turned upside down. Gentlemen formerly were those who idled and did nothing ; to-day they are those who work and make an honest living. Disease and sickness used to be regarded as Fate going his rounds, quite the proper thing ; to-day they are regarded as the results of unclean habits and carelessness. In old days birth was everything ; to-day, ability. In old days women were never seen out ; to-day they ride in the electric tram-cars and go picnicking out of the city. In old days children always stood before their parents ; to-day parents stand in awe of their children. In old days money came to him who wielded the bastinado ;

to-day it comes to him who works hard and puts something in the savings bank. But in so great a breaking up, the nation, from a religious point of view, is quite at sea. A Christian literature, as nothing else, will help them get their bearings under these new conditions. *This Society is the one source available.* If it had an income of a few thousand dollars a year, it could provide a constant supply of good books to help the changing world into the paths of peace.

EDUCATION.

Public education to-day is in accord with the laws laid down by the Imperial Government of Japan, a most excellent system of secular study. It will assuredly transform the Korean people from an ancient race, of the time of Abraham, to an up-to-date, important part of this great Empire, but it does not purpose to undertake the religious teaching of the students ; favouring neither Shinto, Buddhist, Confucian, nor Christian, but leaving each strictly to his own desire and pleasure. It is left to Christian people to pass on the blessing received from their fathers to these children of the East.

THE LANGUAGE.

China has evolved the most disheartening script in the world, and to it, no doubt, can be attributed much of China's inability to pull herself together. The

ideograph she uses is so difficult that the general public can never expect to know it ; and for the women it is entirely hopeless. The characters march in a vertical line down the page, hard to read, impossible to spell,



A PRIMITIVE AGRICULTURIST.

hopeless to guess at, unintelligible, except to the learned few. A literature in it would break one's heart, as it offers a hope, and then denies the possibility of its attainment. Korea's King, surely the wise man of the East, five hundred years ago invented a simple alphabet, that with twenty-five letters writes any sound that is spoken. So simple is it, that those who saw it born into the world said it could be learned in an afternoon. A circle, a right angle, and combinations of these constitute its make-up. Here is an instrument ready

made, but little used, until this Society came into being, and yet admirably prepared to help toward the benefit and uplift of this people. The more simple and miraculous does it seem in view of the difficult writings of the

East. Old women read it with ease, yes, learn it even in the days of failing eyesight and beclouded vision. This simple script is sufficient to let two million girls out of prison into the freedom and joy of intellectual knowledge. Had we the means we could make many a heart to rejoice at the mission of this simple language.

THE GREATEST BLESSING TO THE GREATEST NUMBER.

We hear much these days of a wider education for Asia, and rightly so. To deliver her from the thralldom of the past, and set her free, can only be done by a process of intellectual enlightenment, and best, we think, through Christian education.

Mr. Severance came to Korea, looked the ground over, and found his heart drawn out to the needs of better medical equipment, so he gave liberally of his means to found a medical school. It stands to-day and does excellent work.

Mr. Wanamaker, though he never saw Korea, heard of the needs of young men, and gave likewise to them the Y.M.C.A. building that stands in the middle of the city of Seoul, doing its part for the uplift of the nation.

Others have given for schools and colleges, but the greatest blessing to the greatest number is surely Korea's widest need. An output of Christian literature

would touch more than the Medical School, more than the Y.M.C.A., more than any college.

THE GREATEST CHURCH.

I read in the "Outlook," of April 5th : "New York City is to have another magnificent Church building—that will house St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church. It will occupy an entire block front in Park Avenue, from Fiftieth to Fifty-first Street, and will probably cost over \$4,000,000. The rector of St. Bartholomew's, Dr. Leighton Parks, says this vast sum cannot be raised on subscriptions of \$5,000 and \$10,000 ; it will require subscriptions of \$100,000. The congregation believe that these sums will be forthcoming."

Could we secure but one such subscription of \$100,000 for Korea, we think the kind giver, looking across the distant meridians out to this rim of the world, would see a meeting-house of vaster proportion than St. Bartholomew's, domed with the sky, walled by the sea, and seating fourteen million people, who wait for some helpful word such as St. Bartholomew's, and the many others, have lying by in such rich abundance.

WHAT SIXTY-THREE LETTERS SAY,

It seems to those who are in touch with the situation that a great good could be done. This people, reading one language, living within the compact limits of their

little land, awake to a new world and a new era, stand ready to receive gratefully books that will stimulate the mind and help the soul. So think the missionaries.

I have sixty-three letters by me, as I write, pressing this need.

One writes : “ The annual product is pitifully small compared with what should be done.”

Another : “ Translations of good books are of incalculable help when placed in the hands of the native Christians.”

Another : “ Would that the Society were endowed with \$100,000 above the regular gifts.”

Another : “ There is no question as to need. One of the greatest needs in this needy land to-day is a Christian literature.”

Another : “ Books for the women.”

Another : “ If it had not been for this Society, I don't know how we could have carried on our work in Korea,” &c.

CONCLUSION.

The use of the funds is in the hands of the Board of Trustees of the Korean Religious Book and Tract Society. Twenty members of this Board are elected from the general missionary community for periods of four years. Each autumn the places of retiring members, one fourth of the whole number, are filled up at the Annual Meeting of the Society. In addition to these,

there are eight Special Trustees, representing the various Missions working in Korea, and officially appointed by them. The Board appoints an Executive Committee, who take the oversight of the work of the Society, select the books to be translated, pass on the work done and direct as to the publishing.

Mr. Gerald Bonwick is the General Secretary, who sees that the work of the Committee is carried out.

It is a quarter of a century since the Society came into being. The second quarter will have greater needs and will make greater demands. May God grant that they may be met.

Gifts will be gratefully acknowledged by the General Secretary,

Mr. GERALD BONWICK,

The Korean Religious Book and Tract Society,

c/o The American Tract Society,

Park Avenue,

New York City, U.S.A.





